1627 Hunting Spoils

Despite the fact that Rain's clash with the Stone Worm had only lasted a dozen seconds, she was tired. Not only because she had tracked the creature down for a long time first, spending hours to prepare the ambush, but also because those few seconds of absolute mental concentration and daunting physical exertion took a lot out of her.

That was how it went every time. If a mundane human wanted to face a Nightmare Creature, anything less than giving it your all, and then some, meant death. Not that there were a lot of mundanes going out of their way to fight abominations - not a lot of those who lived to tell the tale, at least.

In that sense, Rain was an anomaly.

Sadly, the harsh physical demands of the hunt were not over after her prey was dead.

Grimacing, Rain gripped her sharp hunting knife and went about dressing the Stone Worm.

Its flesh was wiry and tough. Its scales were even tougher. Even with her knife having been forged from mystical steel, it took all of Rain's strength to rend the dead abomination. Especially because she didn't want to become drenched in its blood - not only because that would have been icky, but also because the stench of blood could attract other Nightmare Creatures,

"Curse it.,, curse it all…”

She worked up a sweat, eventually taking off her Jacket and vest and rolling up the sleeves of her henley. The ash continued to rain from the sky, smearing her Ivory skin like black ink.

Her teacher, meanwhile, sat comfortably on a rock and observed her with a content expression, not even trying to help.

'Bastard..’

"Cursing again? Rain, a proper young lady should act with modesty, poise, and decorum. Ah, you were such a well-mannered girl when we met... where did you even pick up these bad habits? Who taught you such foul language? Tell me, and I'll beat the crap out of the damned bastard..."

She paused for a moment, glared at him, and then returned to her work without saying a word.

"Stop pouting."

'I'm not pouting!’

Rain collected the abomination's sharp fangs - those could be used to fashion arrowheads - then moved to its limbs and separated the stonelike blades from the joints. The blades could be sold in Ravenheart for a good price or bartered for other materials.

However, the true treasure was the hide of the Stone Worm, Although it was merely a Dormant Monster, the scales of these creatures were lightweight and tough. The Awakened who had not earned a good armor-type Memory yet often used them to fashion scalemail those with plenty of coins could afford something better, of course, but there were many of those who couldn't.

And when the latter got in trouble, their armor needed to be mended with even more scales. Therefore, there was always demand for Stone Worm's hides. Rain herself had worn such a scalemail armor at one point, but after hunting an Awakened Beast, she switched to equipment made from its leather.

So, she could earn a pretty penny by selling this hide. It was just that harvesting it was a tough and dirty process.

She arduously separated the hide from the flesh of the monster, cleaned it the best she could, and rolled it into a hefty sack. Tying the sack with rope, she grimaced and rubbed it with ash to get rid of the smell.

Then, she retrieved her two arrows. After studying them for a few moments, Rain sighed. One could be repaired, but the other was unsalvageable. Her arsenal of arrows was growing dangerously poor - there were plenty of them in the quiver, but only a few of those made from the fangs of the Awakened Beast remained.

She cleaned the intact arrow and put it aside.

Finally, for the most important part...

Fishing out two gleaming crystals from the remains of the Stone Worm, Rain looked at her teacher and smiled.

"Shall I?”

He raised his white hands and applauded her quietly.

"Go ahead. Good kill."

Rain pushed what remained of the hideous carcass into the pit with her foot, then knelt and placed the crystals on a flat rock. She often saw Awakened crush soul shards in their fists, but her mundane hands bruised terribly if she tried. So, instead, she simply brought the butt of her knife down on them.

The crystals shattered, and she felt an almost imperceptible amount of foreign essence trickle into her soul. It was a strange sensation, and one she had only become able to perceive recently.

Her teacher seemed satisfied, and she was, too.

"Teacher... how long do you think it will be before 1 can attempt forming a soul core?"

He studied her for a few moments, then smiled.

"Soon. You can already sense and control your essence, so it won't be long before it awakens. However....

A soft sigh escaped from his lips.

"Something tells me that it is not soon enough. So, we'll need to hurry up. You have to hunt another Awakened abomination. A strong one, as well."

Rain shivered, remembering the last time she faced an Awakened Nightmare Creature. That clash had almost cost her life. Had that th been strong, in her teacher's eyes?

She gave him a long look.

"You know that we can simply buy an Awakened soul shard or few? It will be expensive, sure. But my parents can help. Wait... actually, why do we need to buy them? Teacher, you're so great and awesome. Just do your thing! Tell a bunch of powerful abominations to be gone, and let me collect the shards!"

He stared at her dubiously and coughed.

"Well... sure, you're right. Your teacher is awesome! I can kill the abominations for you..."

Rain's eyes gleamed.

"Really?"

But he was not done talking:

"...and while I'm at it, why don't I Awaken for you, as well? Should I also feed you from a spoon, like a little baby?"

He scoffed.

"Let me tell you, a baby I knew Transcended before learning how to walk. And he didn't even have me as a teacher! Come to think of it, what's your excuse? Huh? What do you have to say for yourself?"

Rain glared at him hatefully, then looked away.

"Forget I said anything"

She cleaned her weapons, sheathed her knife, and fastened the rolled hide of the Stone Worm to her pack. Finally ready to depart, Rain hoisted the on her shoulders and started to walk.

It was time to head back to Ravenheart.